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ABSTRACT

Ethics is an area of increasing concern in U.S. colleges and universities. A recent survey of 183 institutions with major teaching focus on public relations (with 134 returns, for a 73% return rate), indicated that only one in four institutions offers a specific ethics course, and less than half of this group require it. Nevertheless, an overwhelming 93% of the respondents asserted that ethics is included in all courses. A thorough review of all texts cited as most used, however, disclosed slight or cursory inclusion of ethics in texts at all levels. If ethics is an integral part of the coursework, a major burden of that inclusion rests with instructors for significant discussion, lacking textual examples. Most of the ethics courses themselves focus on journalism, not public relations. Ethics, largely neglected, or served with lip-service pieties, requires increasing attention in the public relations sequence. (Author)

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# TEACHING PUBLIC RELATIONS: THE ROLE OF ETHICS

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AEJMC

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# TEACHING PUBLIC RELATIONS: THE ROLE OF ETHICS

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*ABSTRACT*

TEACHING PUBLIC RELATIONS:
THE ROLE OF ETHICS

Ethics is an area of increasing concern in U.S. colleges and universities. A recent survey of 183 institutions with major teaching focus on public relations yielded a 73 percent return from 134. Only one in four offers a specific ethics course and less than half of this group require it. Nevertheless, an overwhelming (93 percent) number of the respondents asserted that ethics is included in all courses. A thorough review of all texts cited as most used, however, discloses slight or cursory inclusion of ethics in texts at all levels. If ethics is an integral part of the coursework, a major burden of that inclusion rests with instructors for significant discussion, lacking textual examples. Most of the ethics courses themselves focus on journalism, not public relations. Ethics, largely neglected, or served with lip-service pieties, requires increasing attention in the public relations sequence.

# TEACHING PUBLIC RELATIONS:
## The Role of Ethics

With an increased awareness of ethical issues -- in government and business as well as in education -- institutions of higher learning have a unique opportunity to insert this topic into appropriate courses of study. Traditionally, ethics has been presented within departments of philosophy or religion. Increasingly, however, ethics has become an integral part of communication courses, particularly in journalism. A growing portion of communication students are attracted into public relations. If these students bypass journalism as a major course of study, what opportunities are available to them to explore ethical issues and develop a basis for moral reasoning related to the public relations discipline?

Moreover, what teaching and textbook assistance will be provided to assure that ethics becomes incorporated into the school of communication curriculum? Clearly, more educators are aware of the growing interest in ethics than heretofore. And what does this growing trend mean to public relations students? So far, these questions have not been resolved.

In order to ascertain the role of ethics in the curriculum, a comprehensive survey among selected colleges and universities was undertaken with a focus on public relations. This universe proved to be representative of schools of communication and provided a convenient means of data analyses. Some 183 schools were identified by the Public Relations Society of America in its publication, *Where to Study Public Relations.*[1] The response (from July through October 1988) totalled 134, for a 73 percent return rate.[2]

Expectedly, the vast majority of respondents (97 percent) "strongly" agreed or "agreed" that "the study of ethics is important for students preparing to practice public relations ..." and 90 percent expressed the opinion that ethics "is increasingly becoming an important issue." None disagreed with either statement. Since ethics is the 1980s equivalent of America's belief in Mom and apple pie, practically every respondent, as might be expected, reported that their public relations courses include ethics (93 percent). Only three percent failed to

respond to this question. A few (four percent) stated flatly that courses did not include ethics and furthermore there were no plans whatsoever to include ethics in the curriculum in the next 24 months.

Oddly enough, the college educators who responded to this survey felt that the primary responsibility for strengthening ethical standards in public relations should fall to the professional practitioners (46 percent). Others felt that the professional associations (36 percent) or educational institutions (26 percent) should be responsible for ethical issues. Tied for last place in the ranking by educators for the inculcation of ethics in the professional disciplines were religious institutions or governmental legislation (four percent). Interestingly enough, a write-in by educators indicated that the best source for assuring ethical conduct by public relations practitioners was "news media" (four percent).

The tendency to look to the news media as a watchdog for wrongdoers in the public relations aspect of the communication-promotional curriculum may reflect a bias held by educators. Most departments' ethics courses (courses in ethics pertaining to the public relations students) are taught under the auspices of journalism (18 percent). Public relations account for less than one percent. Most ethics courses are taught under the rubric of "the communications department" (64 percent). For a number of schools of communication the study of ethics is left to the School of Business (seven percent) or to the Philosophy Department (four percent).

Significantly, only one in four colleges or universities offers courses devoted exclusively to the study of communication ethics. Of the 75 percent which do not offer such a course, five percent assert that they are planning to do so within the next 24 months. Schools that offer courses devoted exclusively to ethics in communication (25 percent) are a minority. Less than half of these (48 percent) make ethics courses mandatory. But within this group, 25 percent note that they are planning to expand the study of ethics.

## THE TEXTS IN USE

In general, colleges and universities that offer specific ethics courses, as expected, show little uniformity in the texts used. The text most used is *Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning*,[3] the choice for 13 percent, followed by

*Groping for Ethics in Journalism*[4] (recall, the focus was on courses for public relations students). Other respondents cited *Ethics in Human Communication*,[5] with a small percentage using *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*.[6] A comparison of texts reported by survey respondents disclosed no other duplication in texts and these varied considerably, with the media law textbooks and journals often cited as the texts used for ethics courses.

## Basic Public Relations Texts

It is evident that if most students are exposed to ethics this must occur in their general course work, not in courses on ethics. Recall that more than 90 percent of the instructors agree that ethics is important and 93 percent assert that it is covered in course work. How does ethics fare in the most popular texts reported in use by educators?

For the public relations courses that respondents stated include ethics as a topic, a number of textbooks were identified. By far, the most frequently cited text was *Effective Public Relations*.[7] As the authors note correctly this is "the standard basic textbook."[8] References to ethics are sparse, however. Through 600-plus pages, ethics is mentioned in passing; briefly noted in the context of the Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA) code, with the ethics of corporate financial entities and a short discussion of the social impact and responsibilities of public relations practitioners. In this last section, the notion of standards is submerged into "concern for the behavior of individual practitioners" with a major focus on professional standards and practices.[9] Nevertheless, the text devotes a half-dozen pages to national organizations with a section "Toward a Code of Ethics" and the PRSA Code. It does discuss the code in some detail with a look at ethics and the issue of professional integrity. The authors go on to offer some criticism for the operation of the code and its weaknesses of enforcement through possible licensure and problems with that means of enforcement. It gives examples of the PRSA's lack of vigor in this area, but stops short of any in-depth discussion. Several examples of corporate guides to ethical behavior from various codes and speeches are included. But specific questions of integrity and ethics are confined to several brief paragraphs amid a discussion of social concerns and the new environment.[10]

Case studies fail to focus on ethics and discussions of theoretical systems

are lacking. Obviously, this is an excellent text with extensive descriptions of the role of public relations. It is by far the most popular text in classrooms across the country and used by many professionals as well. In its dealings with ethics, however, the text appears to be less than satisfactory especially if, as most of the respondents indicate, this is the major source for discussion of ethical conduct for public relations students.

Public relations educators cited three texts as the next most popular for classroom use. The first discussed here -- *This Is PR: The Realities of Public Relations* -- cites its third edition.[11] This version, as heretofore, devotes a single chapter to ethics, the last one: "PR and Social Responsibility."[12] In earlier editions a chapter clearly labelled with ethics in its title was placed toward the front of the text. But the new focus for ethics is more detailed and relevant to students. The authors discuss the licensing procedure as a means to ethical enforcement, graced with a personal note from the legendary Edward L. Bernays (he's for it).[13]

A chapter on "social responsibility" also includes a discussion of advertising. Directed to public relations students, the authors recognize the "strong linkage" of the two areas.[14] The context is brief, to be sure. Overall this text appears to be comprehensive in its coverage of ethics. Critics can point out that excellent case studies inviting ethics discussion are passed over with only brief mentions -- the Firestone 500 tire debacle and the Love Canal episode, for example. The text explains ethics:

> The study of ethics falls into two broad categories: comparative ethics .... the purview of social scientists, and normative ethics .... the domain of philosophers and theologians. Comparative ethics, sometimes called descriptive ethics, is a study of how different cultures observe ethical standards. Both diversity and similarity are of interest to social scientists .... ethical behaviors ... spill over into .... theology and philosophy.[15]

A curious identification in this text isolates the publics to whom public relations practitioners have ethical responsibilities. Also included are discussions of persuasion, representation of foreign governments and politicians, the role of political action committees and advertising. The PRSA Code is included in Appendix A with interpretations of political and financial PR along with

related professional codes.[16]

While the text is comprehensive, the reader could wish for more in-depth discussion of other areas -- politics, the news media and so forth -- where pertinent issues of ethics have arisen and are relevant to public relations students. The problem of governmental PR is particularly weak. But this is not a book about ethics; it is a text for public relations students -- and an excellent one. One wonders, however, if in the haste to wrap-up a course full of detail that last chapter might simply get lost by semester's end.

A new edition (published after the survey) gives instructors more help in teaching ethics and public relations.[17] Part III, "PR's Ethical and Legal Environment," contains two chapters -- one that includes ethics and social responsibility and a second that deals with laws affecting public relations.[18] As a special section and toward the front of the text, the topic should draw more interest and attention. In this latest revision of a standard text, this ethics chapter has been rewritten with a great deal more material -- comments from a number of the PR professionals that help and improve the previous version of the text. Sometimes not, e.g., [paying bribes to foreign nationals as the price of doing business] "I hate it. It makes me sick. But there simply is no other way to get things done abroad."[19] A student might benefit a great deal more from a description of the Lockheed and Martin-Marietta cases than this hand-wringing piety.

The PR students are given a look into the problems of dealing with journalists and the text benefits from a greatly-enhanced section on advertising practices.[20] The text is improved, unquestionably. It would be more improved with more specific case studies; it does give a full-page box to the Anthony Franco-PRSA affair but the episode was a lot more than a botched failure "to communicate."[21] Also, since the authors devote attention to the problems of journalists, in the opinion of this one-time newsman there are far too many unattributed quotes and unidentified sources and culprits; but instructors now have a lot more material to teach with this text.

Another most-used text cited by respondents is *The Practice of Public Relations*.[22] Earlier editions did not mention ethics. The edition cited by respondents does address the subject in several areas and Appendix A reprints the PRSA's Code of Professional Standards. One interview comments that organizations in "the public eye" should have a code of ethics. There are scattered references to ethics and a catch-all "social responsibility" without

much of an explanation.[23]

There is, however, a separate chapter, "The Ethical Dimension," that does discuss ethics but again without a hard focus of what it is.[24] Opportunities are wasted. An example of the PRSA's poor handling of media and general stonewalling in the 1986 episode of its former president's resignation over violations of Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) regulations is merely passed over without using this case study fully.[25] It does draw the student's attention to organizations such as The Ethics Resource Center and The Public Affairs Council (not in the chapter on ethics), an organization of public affairs executives, and includes the ethical guidelines stated by a number of organizations.[26]

For ethical issues, much is left for student participation with questions designed to prompt discussion. Lacking are any firm guidelines or in-depth case studies to provide systematic discussions based on policy or theory. Again, it is a back-of-the-book area that is apt to get lost in the usual end-of-term hustle to wind up a complex topic.

A new edition[27] published after the survey was completed focuses on ethics with more discussion. A new chapter, "Ethics," is included toward the front of the text.[28] It has been rewritten with additional features added and updated with new interviews -- Larry Speakes, Barbara Lee Toffler.[29] (Grantland Rice was not a famed football coach.)[30] And journalism is included but still advertising is neglected, and some mention would surely pertain to the public relations business. At least, ethics has been put forward in the text and is more likely to be discussed. But the journalism citations are too sparse, even for PR students and those instances where in-depth discussion would benefit PR students -- the Franco case fiasco, for instance -- are still brushed over.[31]

Another of the widely-used texts is *Public Relations: Strategies and Tactics*.[32] Most of the responding institutions cited the 1986 edition, but it should be noted that a second edition appeared on the market in early 1989. Both editions devote an entire chapter to ethics, but the later version is more comprehensive with Chapter 6, "Ethics and Professionalism," up front.[33] One aspect in which this text appears superior to others is the judicious and effective application of pertinent ethical reminders through virtually all of its chapters, with guidelines for application of ethics in persuasion, politics, media relations and reporting of research. It does include the ethical guidelines for business

public affairs professionals issued by The Public Affairs Council and The Ethics Resource Center, a non-profit organization that assists companies and groups in preparing codes of ethics and conducts research on ethics.[34] The text language is comprehensible to students. For example, it quotes Tommy Ross, who told *Fortune* magazine, "Unless you are willing to resign an account for a job over a matter of principle, it is no use to call yourself a member of the world's newest profession -- for you are already a member of the world's oldest."[35] A major ethics case study dealing with Lockheed Aircraft Corporation is discussed in the first edition but is truncated in the later version.[36]

*Public Relations: Strategies and Tactics* does not attempt to establish or discuss a philosophical framework, but it succinctly states in two paragraphs an understandable and workable definition of ethics:

> Ethics refers to the value system by which a person determines what is right or wrong, fair or unfair, just or unjust ... expressed through moral behavior in specific situations .... The difficulty in ascertaining whether an act is ethical lies in the fact that norms of behavior vary widely ....
>
> Some people may make decisions and judge the actions of others based upon absolutist Judeo-Christian principles. Others may rely upon such ethical orientations as secular humanism ... utilitarianism ... or positivism .... The range is broad, involving philosophical discussions ... ethical considerations comprise a basic part of public relations.[37]

The authors must be applauded for including comprehensive coverage of pertinent cases that bear on ethics for students with a contemporary tone. For example, the authors cite the not-too-distant Michael K. Deaver case, in which the former adviser to President Reagan as deputy chief of staff was indicted and convicted of lying to the Congress concerning his lobbying activities after he left the White House. Moreover, the Deaver case is discussed in depth in a later chapter.[38] The Iran-Contra scandal is touched upon, along with insider trader cases involving the public relations-lobbying role. More pertinent, perhaps to PR students, is an extensive discussion of the Franco-SEC affair and the PRSA. The authors give full and complete attention to the incident but focus the discussion on ethics to the failings of the PRSA itself for its obvious "stonewalling" of the episode and they document the blackeye inflicted on the industry

itself by the failure of its self-professed watch-dog code.[39] Ethics and questions of veracity, deceit and integrity are not confined to a single chapter with the usual pious platitudes and reference to so-called codes. The authors come back to this issue again and again in the proper subject environment.

If we examine other texts identified by respondents (with no specific ranking according to use) for public relations courses, ethics coverage is similarly sporadic. For example, ethics is not much in evidence in *Public Relations in Action.*[40] There are several brief references -- in Chapter 11, in a six-page section, "The Ethics of the Profession,"[41] followed by five pages on legal restraints. The author does refer to the APRS code (it is printed in full in the appendix).[42] The author includes an unsatisfactory box sketching in broad brush the conflict-of-interest incident that centered on Mrs. Jacob Javits, wife of the then-ranking Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee, who proposed that she perform PR work for Iranian interests. The box text describes the public disclosure with the result that "Pressure forced her to resign." The author commends the firm involved for the "speedy resolution of the problem."[43] Why? What resolution? What problem? Not really enlightening for the curious student. Nor is there any real meat to feed an enquiring mind. Just what is ethics about? You will find little here to trouble you.

Ethics is mentioned early on in *Public Relations: The Profession and the Practice*,[44] in Chapter Five, "Ethics and Professionalism."[45] It is, however, the shortest chapter in the text. More troubling is the fact that the text deals in a general way with issues of ethical conduct. For example, the authors mention but slide by the real issues of interest to public relations people -- students and professionals -- with brief citations of Firestone Tire's "stonewalling" and the "conflicting" statements with regard to the Three Mile Island incident.[46] And, like many others, the authors brush by the Franco-PRSA debacle without so much as a mention of his name or what happened other than "the resignation under fire of their president."[47] Where events are mentioned, nowhere are students given insight into the issues, ethical or professional, sufficient enough to discuss there in proper context. Later, the authors do discuss under "Consumer Relations" Procter & Gamble's handling of its Rely tampons and public health.[48] But here and elsewhere brief mentions of the A.H. Robins' Dalkon Shield incident and American Motors' suit over the safety of its Jeep[49] really fail to make these events relevant to the obligation corporate public relations

professionals have to the public. The text simply fails to seriously address the ethics issue.

Ethics is mentioned from time to time in *Public Relations: Concepts and Practices*,[50] but the interested reader must be diligent in seeking out this elusive subject. Some discussion will be found in the last chapter,[51] under "Personal, Professional, and Educational Considerations."[52] Again, one suspects that in the rush to complete a multitude of topics, the hard-pressed instructor might neglect to include this "very personal" (the author's words)[53] issue of ethics. There is a discussion of professional ethics that embraces a variety of fields including public relations. Included are commentary from a variety of sources -- business, academic and professional PR people who stress in their brief remarks truth and credibility.[54] The PRSA code is mentioned and included in an appendix.[55] About a third of this chapter touches on ethics and, in fact, it closes with a "mini-case" on ethical issues. But little in the way of actual case studies with real companies, real people and hard issues is presented. Perhaps of all the texts noted, this one defines the difficult problem of presenting ethical issues to the student, even the advanced undergraduate.

## Advanced Public Relations Texts

If, as respondents assert, students are taught ethics all across the curriculum, in many instances the basic textbooks leave much to be desired. A brief sampling of selected advanced texts discloses the same problem. Few texts provide much guidance to the student when it comes to ethical issues. For example, one text used by many universities for advanced undergraduate courses, *Public Relations Writing: Form and Style*, fails to mention ethics.[56]

Essentially a collection of readings, *Precision Public Relations* [57] is a relatively new text. Enlivened by a variety of viewpoints with a wide range of comment and outlook, it is singularly bereft of ethics. One looks in vain through the index[58] and notes its absence. The text deals with media credibility and news sources.[59] But even something like "community relations" or "client relationship"[60] fail to grapple with any ethical issues. Ethics is simply not presented.

For advanced students, *The Creation of Consent: Public Relations in Practice* [61] is an excellent text, useful to the professional as well as to students; the author includes a chapter that considers ethics, the last chapter in the text, "Ethical and Legal Considerations." Of the ten or so pages (about the average

length of many chapters), approximately six discuss ethics that deal with public relations, business and government.[62] The government is wanting and, so too, is business and there is a discussion of the APRS code and some of the problems that can come about trying to follow it. The code is included in an appendix.[63] But beyond vague comments nothing really of substance is included. One feature unique to this text is a listing with supplementary material describing a dozen major corporations, public, private and government. But the author fails to mine this rich lode to discuss specific cases that embrace genuine ethical issues. Instructors have much work to do in order to flesh out this text with sufficient ethical issues for students to ponder.

More advanced students will use *Experts in Action: Inside Public Relations*.[64] But they will find little on ethics. The index does not even list the topic. If the interested reader looks for relevant subjects like "credibility" or "consumer affairs" to include any significant look at ethical issues, the search will be fruitless. Unquestionably, this text is authoritative and one of the best in its discussions by recognized experts, who provide valuable insight into how public relations works. Nevertheless, ethics is not present nor are there any case studies that demonstrate and explain how a bungled public relations operation can lose credibility for the client and the agency. Again, the burden for the classroom instructor is a major one if any significant ethical content is to be included.

## ETHICS IN THE CURRICULUM

Despite the assertions from most college and university teachers that ethics is covered in the general course work, one must view that claim with less than confidence. Most of the texts cited fall far short of what should be covered for public relations. Many of the textbooks cited are woefully lacking in any confrontation of ethics. In order to bring this issue into proper focus, the burden for beyond-the-text preparation is staggering. Any college educator knows that it is a formidable task to cover even the basics for virtually any course of study. For the courses cited here, where the fundamental principles are manifold, acquiring additional information in an intangible sphere, like ethics for instance, is more than likely to be swept aside in the need to nail down necessary skills for the business world. Nor is it likely that the subject will come up in more advanced courses, despite survey respondents who assert "ethics is all across

the curriculum." Few, if any, of the advanced texts cited mention the subject. Students with the greatest opportunity to become acquainted with some of the ethical issues confronting them in the business world stand the best chance within an institution that offers a separate course of study for ethics. Less than 25 percent of the colleges and universities surveyed do offer such courses; less than half of this number require that students take a course in ethics.

Ethics Texts

Since most of the ethics courses offered (required or optional for the students) are in the journalism sequence, expectedly the most-used text as reported by survey respondents focuses on journalism. Bear in mind that these courses were for the communication department's public relations students as well. By a large margin, the most-used text reported is *Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning.*[65] The text includes excellent case studies beginning with "Ethical Foundations and Perspectives" using systematic and analytical guidelines. Traditional philosophical references introduced with ethics focused on classical origins and definitions. After a discussion of "News" in this text undoubtedly useful to journalism students, an "Advertising" section divided into six chapters follows with a brief chapter on Public Relations.[66] A final section deals with "Entertainment," five chapters that could well apply to public relations students,[67] and within its journalism context is fairly generous to public relations issues and cases. In sum, public relations students need not feel like orphans of the storm with this textbook. The cases could be more pointed and with less of the names-have-been-changed to protect the guilty and more pertinent. This is only a quibble, however, in what appears to be a useful text for public relations students.

The second most-mentioned text in the required ethics courses is *Groping for Ethics in Journalism.*[68] The approach here is straight to newspapers -- no magazines, no radio, no mass media -- no theoretical or philosophical bases, either. The approach is straight-forward and pragmatic. There is no place for public relations, either.[69] The author gets his point across that PR and Ad people influence news coverage. Public relations is only mentioned in the chapter "The Seducers: Freebies, Junkets and Perks."[70] This is evidently how those PR rascals manage to seduce those pure-hearted journalism types. (But this one-

time newsman does not share the author's jaundiced eye toward the Newspaper Guild, either.) This is obviously a book aimed at print journalists written by a fine, one-time newsman. Given that limitation, however, its popularity and use for public relations is, indeed, curious.

*Ethics in Human Communication*,[71] identified as the third most-used text, offers and provides the philosophical foundations for the study of ethics. Topics range from "An Approach to Ethical Judgment" to "Situational Perspectives." The text examines mass media, advertising and propaganda. Other sections that deal with political studies include examples involving the John Birch Society, Richard Nixon and Watergate; these might prove useful to PR students. Other, more appropriate cases could be mentioned for a text used by the advertising-public relations sequences. Public relations fails to appear but propaganda is discussed in "Ethics and Propaganda." The chapter on "Formal Codes of Ethics" ignores public relations.[72]

In the general courses on ethics, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* emerged as the fourth most-popular text.[73] Obviously, this work is not related directly to the needs of public relations students. Nevertheless, this book is one of the most useful as an adjunct reader within any course that stresses ethics since it provides an invaluable introduction to the classicists.[74] Its use as a major text may lie with the fact that communications educators, unfamiliar with the classic texts and unwilling to subject public relations students to pure journalism ethics, prefer to focus on general issues. There are no direct case studies of PR examples. Indeed, these areas are largely ignored except for passing reference but there are useful allusions to political issues. *Lying* is invaluable to students who may be prompted to pursue a greater understanding of ethics within a philosophical framework. Bok refers to publicity in a narrow sense in "Justification and Publicity."[75] She states the question: "Which lies would survive the appeal for justification to reasonable people?"[76] And to respond, Bok includes relevant political examples. The select biography is useful as well.[77] Bok's is an outstanding work that brings the issues of ethical theory within a modern world; practical and intellectually stimulating.

Beyond these four texts, no one source was reported by two or more institutions. Many used mass media law texts; one used *PR Reporter* and the Holy Bible was mentioned. Those who teach in the public relations area may protest the handling they receive from the journalism-dominated departments

that have held traditional sway in their schools and maintain that hold in "communication" schools or departments. But for now, this is the way things are with regard to the study of ethics.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Most college educators pay lip-service observation of the ethics issue and yet realize and agree that it is of growing importance. Many of the academic respondents are not at all certain that ethics should be taught -- schools received a low priority from respondents citing those groups responsible. Those educators with an understanding of history realize that in the nineteenth century most universities expended great effort toward the moral growth of their students.[78] Indeed, this goal was clearly recognized by authorities and students alike as an integral part of the role of the university. For whatever reasons, that pendulum appears to be swinging back and we are witnessing a revival of moral education. Clearly, recent events -- perhaps beginning with Watergate -- have stimulated concern among students and faculty alike that moral issues play a critical role in their lives, personal and professional. The discipline of public relations has waged a largely unsuccessful effort to emerge from the domain once dominated by the journalism department -- educators in this aspect of mass communication find themselves riding the crest of a growing wave of students. In the haste to accommodate these numbers, public relations departments have been created and in many cases borrow heavily from the traditional courses offered by the journalism departments; for example, in the writing and media law courses where these are required. That fact is evident from the survey disclosure that many of the ethics courses for public relations students are taught in the journalism area, with texts clearly aimed at journalism students. And these, in some cases, reflect a traditional newsroom bias. Public relations curricula are not watered-down journalism; the issues differ. One of the major efforts required from public relations educators is to focus on an academic curriculum that sheds the "trade school" mentality often associated with public relations in the communication field.

What is required at the outset, of course, are teachers who know ethics, issues and theory. Clearly, ethics requires a great deal of thought and knowledge to focus discussions on the moral issues of public relations. If a majority of the

respondents in the survey assert that ethical issues are presented in the normal course work, a generous observer will agree. The thought emerges, however, that these teachers must exert vast efforts to reflect ethical aspects into the syllabus, burdened as they are by textbooks that fail to ease their task. But the cynical realist must question how ethics is covered adequately for public relations students. A separate course in ethics should be required. If it emphasizes the professional area, perhaps it should be preceded by a prerequisite in theory or systems from philosophy departments. What is also needed, to be sure, is a healthy infusion of ethics into every course in the curriculum. Ethical issues can be included in events and procedures beginning with the introductory course through advanced courses. Specific case studies and procedures must be examined in detail to produce a well-trained graduate with an enriched academic background.[79]

On one point we can all agree: no course is solely dependent upon the text alone for its content. Instructors bring a great deal of personal experience and knowledge to augment the syllabus. Unquestionably, however, the issue of unethical conduct cannot be thoroughly explored unless that background is bolstered by sufficient examples of what constitutes wrongdoing in high places in government and in the day-to-day activities of the business marketplace. What should be proper practices for the public relations profession? Arguably, it is difficult for any instructor to inject personal moralities upon the students in the classroom. Many are loath to do so, understandably. If the textbooks can come to grips with the issues of ethics in terms that spell out the conflicts, with examples that provide an object lesson where the public is ill-served, teachers and students alike will benefit. All too often, it appears that the guilty parties are cloaked in anonymity. And explanations of improper practices are blurred or glossed, with the result that students are unable to figure out exactly what was wrong. It is really a question of balance. If the texts can discuss cases of exemplary conduct with specific examples, the other side of the coin deserves an equal measure of explanation. Whistle-blowers are not popular, not in Washington, not in business or even in educational institutions. Textbook authors cannot serve only as cheer leaders for the profession. Let's have more in-depth case studies with concrete examples that are part of the public record and fewer general pieties that do little more than offer homilies.

Unquestionably, ethical issues should be taught. Ethical issues can be

taught, discussed and analyzed in the classroom. Derek Bok, president of Harvard University, states: "... moral issues can be discussed as rigorously as many questions taken up in more established courses in the curriculum."[80] Bok's view is that we should make the effort to build toward substantive courses with competent instructors to teach them. One can only agree.

## NOTES

[1] Many hundreds of colleges and universities teach courses in public relations but in order to narrow-down those with a comprehensive program, the author confined the universe to those affiliated with the Public Relations Society of America and used Michael B. Hesse, Robert Kindall and James Terhune, *Where to Study Public Relations* (New York: Public Relations Society of America, 1986.)

[2] A survey, "Ethics and Promotional Writing in Communications Curricula at Universities and Colleges Offering Advertising and Public Relations Sequences," was conducted June 1988 through October 1988, by the author assisted by Lynn M. Sallott under the auspices of the School of Communication, University of Miami. A questionnaire method was employed through a series of closed and open-ended responses. Ms is not yet published. All data, percentages and comparisons were drawn from survey results. The author is indebted to Ms. Sallott for data tabulation and compilation of survey responses as well as some text citations. Evaluations are the sole responsibility of the author.

[3] Clifford G. Christians, Kim B. Rotzell and Mark Fackler, *Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning*, 2d ed. (New York: Longman, 1987).

[4] H. Eugene Goodwin, *Groping for Ethics in Journalism*, (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1983).

[5] Richard L. Johannesen, *Ethics in Human Communication*, 2d ed. (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1983).
[6] Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choices in Public and Private Life*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
[7] Scott M. Cutlipp, Allen H. Center and Glen M. Broom, *Effective Public Relations*, 6th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1985).
[8] *Ibid.*, p. xv.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 454.
[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 457-463.
[11] Doug Newsom and Allen Scott, *This Is PR: The Realities of Public Relations*, 3d ed. (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1985).
[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 441-470.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 443.
[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 451-452, eight paragraphs.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 446.
[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 471-482.
[17] Doug Newsom, Alan Scott and Judy VanSlyke Turk, *This Is PR: The Realities of Public Relations*, 4th ed. (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1989).
[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 218-290.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 228.
[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 229-236.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 249.
[22] Fraser P. Seitel, *The Practice of Public Relations*, 3d ed. (Columbus, Ohio: Merrill Publishing Co., 1987). This was the text in use by the survey respondents.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 564. Appendix C contains a useful check-list of needs for corporation reporting but this is not ethics.
[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 525-542.
[25] *Ibid.*, p 537.
[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 535-536.
[27] Fraser P. Seitel, *The Practice of Public Relations*, 4th ed. (Columbus, Ohio: Merrill Publishing Co., 1989).
[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 103-131.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 106, 110.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 123.
[32] Dennis L. Wilcox, Phillip H. Ault and Warren K. Agee, *Public Relations: Strategies and Tactics*, 2d ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1989).
[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 117-143.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 27.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 133.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 130*ff*; see the 1986 edition, pp. 121-126.
[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.
[38] *Ibid.*, pp. 135, 288, and 366-388.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 138.
[40] Robert T. Reilly, *Public Relations in Action*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1987).
[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 388-392.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 584.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 389.
[44] Otis Baskin and Craig Aronoff, *Public Relations: The Profession and The Practice*, 2d ed. (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1983).
[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 84-98.
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 86.
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 92.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 290.
[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 293-294.
[50] Raymond Simon, *Public Relations: Concepts and Practices*, 3d ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1986).
[51] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[52] *Ibid.*, pp. 377-404.
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 377.
[54] *Ibid.*, pp. 379-380.
[55] *Ibid.*, pp. 384, 405-412.
[56] Doug Newsom and Bob Carrell, *Public Relations Writing: Form and Style*, 2d ed. (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1986).
[57] Ray Eldon Hiebert, ed., *Precision Public Relations* (New York: Longman, 1988).
[58] *Ibid.*, pp. 391-396.
[59] *Ibid.*, p. 248*ff*.

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 282 and p. 310*ff.*
[61] Charles S. Steinberg, *The Creation of Consent: Public Relations in Practice* (New York: Hastings House, 1975).
[62] *Ibid.*, pp. 163-171.
[63] *Ibid.*, pp. 295-301.
[64] Bill Cantor and Chester Burger eds., *Experts in Action: Inside Public Relations*, 2d ed. (New York: Longman, 1989).
[65] Christians *et al*, *Op. cit.*
[66] *Ibid.*, pp. 125-230.
[67] *Ibid.*, pp. 231-341.
[68] Goodwin, *Op. cit.*
[69] *Ibid.*, p. ix.
[70] *Ibid.*, p. 85*ff.*
[71] Johannesen, *Op. cit.*
[72] *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132.
[73] Bok, *Op. cit.*
[74] *Ibid.*, Appendix, pp. 265-308.
[75] *Ibid.*, p. 92*ff.* Bok's source is John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 133.
[76] *Ibid.*, pp. 93-103.
[77] *Ibid.*, pp. 336-337.
[78] Derek Bok, "Moral and Ethical Education in College: Theoretical and Practical Considerations," *Ethics: Easier Said Than Done* 1 (Winter 1988), pp. 9:15, p. 9.
[79] One point of view that takes exception to the case study approach is a study that has examined the body of knowledge focusing on ethics and public relations. It is a beginning effort in the increasing dialogue to explore the linkage of public relations and ethics. As the authors correctly suggest, no definite pronouncements can yet be forthcoming. Nevertheless, their work confirms this writer's early exploration into similar waters and they confirm the sense that there is a growing awareness by educators and professionals alike that ethics is a critical area for further investigations. This writer and the authors agree that the theoretical basis for linking ethics to public relations is largely absent and needs, somehow, to be incorporated into the curriculum at all levels. Unless there is a gross misreading, however, we part company on the need for

more and effective case studies into the several texts. Obviously, the present author's findings here are that these case studies are lacking in depth and coverage and require more specifics; it remains to be seen whether the research methodologies can be mustered to present a useful theoretical framework. See Catherine A. Pratt and Terry Lynn Renter, "What's Really Being Taught About Ethical Behavior," *Public Relations Review* 25, (Spring 1989), pp. 53-66.

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 12. See S. Bok, *Op. cit.*, pp. 261-262 and Zygmunt Nagorski, "Yes, Socrates, Ethics Can Be Taught," *The New York Times*, February 12, 1989, p. 2(3).